Living According to the Law Written on the Heart

Romans 2:12-15

2021/1/24

Amid the coronavirus crisis, various aspects of human nature are being revealed. Along with many hardships that expose human weakness and ugliness, we also notice the emergence of human beauty and kindness. I am deeply moved by those who, in the midst of suffering, strive to help one another and live together. From the Bible, we must learn the true nature of humanity.

Ⅰ. The Law Written on the Heart

Even in the most difficult circumstances, human kindness and beauty shine forth. This is because humanity was created in the image of God. This is the fundamental humanity shared by all people.

Because of sin, humans under the devil's rule commit ugly deeds. Cruelty may be more common than kindness, but even behind heinous acts there is often a yearning for goodness and fairness. When that yearning is betrayed, it erupts in anger.

For example, the inhumane actions of some Muslims that arose in the Middle East and Africa and have now spread worldwide can be understood as a reaction against betrayals by Christians. Their longing for beauty, hope for equality, and thirst for kindness were crushed, and the violence became a backlash.

Even those Muslims who slaughtered others by slitting throats like chickens still had consciences and moral codes.

Conscience and morality are like seeds of God-given humanity, nurtured and grown by environment, education, and experience.

When we encounter people with moral codes different from ours, we must not simply condemn them but instead respond with understanding and tolerance.

Ⅱ. Living by the Law of the Heart

Conscience and moral codes differ among individuals. Yet the seed of basic human kindness and beauty is universal. The real question is how strongly it remains and how sincerely it is nurtured in individuals, societies, nations, and cultures.

If we use conscience or moral codes as strict standards, we end up judging others who differ from us and condemning foreign cultures. Instead, we must search for and highlight the kindness, compassion, cooperation, and fairness present in their lives, praise these qualities, and encourage their growth.

Ⅲ. The Law of the Heart Precedes the Written Law

The law written on every human heart as basic humanity precedes the law given to Israel in the Old Testament. We must understand that the law of the Old Testament was given to Israel and is not universal. To apply it to other peoples, we must first recover its lost universality and adapt it.

Jesus Himself, though an Israelite, broke the Sabbath law and replaced the Old Testament command "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy" with "Love your neighbor and pray for your enemy." He sternly rebuked those who rigidly interpreted and imposed the law. His words, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice," express this truth.

Therefore, let us act not with endless reasoning, but with kindness, compassion, and care. Let us praise those who act this way, and encourage such actions to spread further. These reflect the very nature of God.

Ⅳ. The Difficulty of Following the Law of the Heart

Yet no matter how hard we try, human weakness makes it impossible to follow the law of the heart perfectly. When we attempt to express what is in our hearts, differences in method often lead to conflict. Feelings of rivalry arise, and simple kindness turns into stubborn self-assertion.

What is needed is the strength to express our true humanity sincerely, and the wisdom to do so well. And this strength and wisdom can only be gained through prayer. God gives us the power to strengthen our original humanity and the wisdom to know how to act.

Even if the one who prays is not a Christian, we should honor the religious awareness within that person and encourage prayer. In this, we Japanese are in a particularly favorable spiritual environment. Many Japanese live without adhering to a particular religion, yet they cherish their own sense of spirituality.

The essence of Japanese religiosity is this: a deep awareness of an invisible, untouchable, indescribable presence—noble, great, strong, and gentle. They sense it in the depths of their hearts and hold it dear.

We should appeal to this sensibility, pointing them to pray to that very One who is unseen and untouchable, who cannot be expressed in words, and show them that He is the Creator of heaven and earth, as taught in the Bible.

Ⅴ. God Draws Near to Those Who Draw Near

The Bible says, "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you." We do not need to fully understand Him before approaching. God is beyond human comprehension. Yet we can still approach Him through prayer. Prayer is conversation, the beginning of fellowship, and the expression of trust. God never rejects those who come in trust.

Naturally, God also hears the prayers of non-Christians. His answers are not reserved only for when one becomes a Christian. Even before conversion, He has known us, understood us, guided us, and helped us. It is He who leads us to pray. Now, through you who are a Christian, He seeks to awaken prayer in the hearts of non-Christians and draw them to Himself.